

EPISODE #74
October 29, 1992

The Valley COMIC N ♦ E ♦ W ♦ S

STORIES:
KID STUFF
TV OR NOT TV
THAT'S DEBATABLE
...AND THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE...
WHITE HOUSE BLUES
BEYOND POLITIX



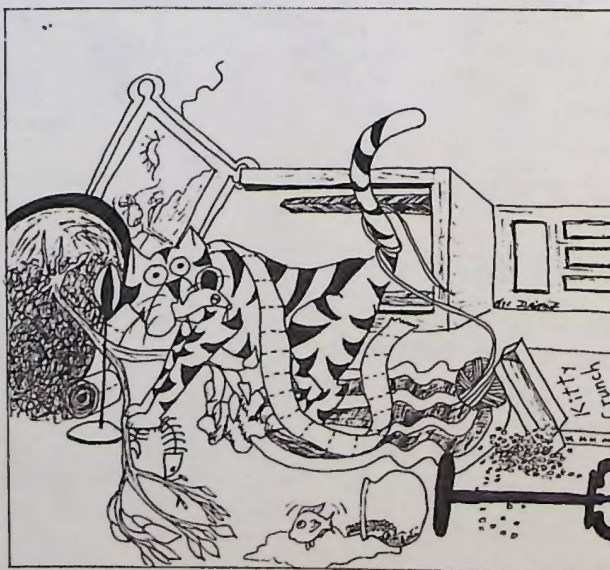
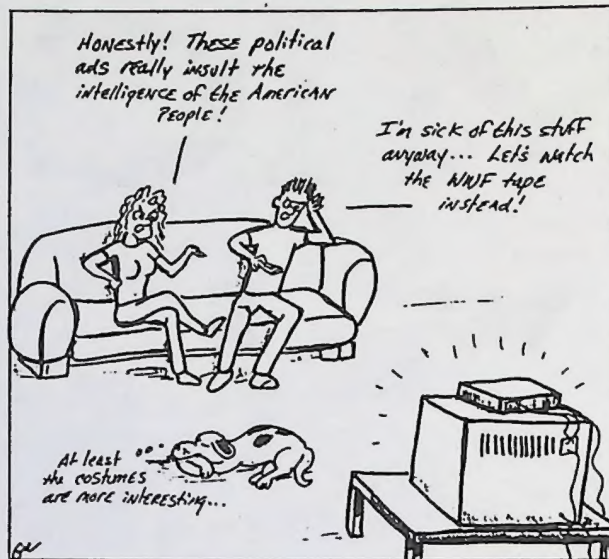
INSIDE

FEATURES: THE FAR SIDE,
DOONESBURY,
CALVIN & HOBBS,
VIEWS OF THE WORLD,
JOE BOB BRIGGS, LEOLD,
IZZY GESELL'S *HUMOR ME*,
THIS MODERN WORLD,
TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT,
EARTHWEEK,
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BIG BROTHER VIEW

by Paul Phipps



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PAGE THREE

by Mike Chrisman

Once every decade or so a musical force appears on the scene that changes the face of music, and sometimes more. Elvis was such a change agent. Dylan. The Beatles. And with their latest release, *Sh-Boomer*, the North American group Elective Surgery has achieved that pivotal status. Elective Surgery was, of course, the first musical group to cater primarily to the dwindling rock 'n' roll fantasies of their peers, the baby boomers, and in so doing it captured a greying nation's heart.

Sh-Boomer is start-to-finish stuffed with the fervent adult punk anthems that have so galvanized the musical world. The album is also a tapestry of other musical styles, each thoroughly infused with Surgery's unique, mid-life-crisis sensibility.

Sh-Boomer's first cut is the lamenting "She (Bought Out My Equity)," an impassioned indictment of real estate transactions in a single-parent economy. Then the Electives slam into overdrive with 12 minutes of searing adult punk: "Razors Slash Aruba/Periodontists Suck." This monumental diatribe comes on like the unholy marriage of The Grateful Dead and Sid Vicious.

Next, in a startling departure, ES turns country, with the mournful "Now My Baby's Left For Harvard, And I'm Bummed." It's an anguished, keening dirge that no upscale boomer will listen to dry-eyed.

But the Surgeons are full of more surprises, none so poignant as the next two songs, which demonstrate the good doctors' willingness to criticize their own generation. The mordant "Nightmare On Minoxidil," and the equally biting "Grope Menopause" are both in-your-face send-ups of vain friends (Warren Beatty is probably the model for "Nightmare") who struggle to preserve their bodies beyond all reason.

The Electives' most bitter venom, however, is reserved for their sole adult punk rap number — "Yo, Broker." Affluent boomers everywhere will commiserate with these lines: "Ya didn't tell me when I should sell. / I lost my shirt; now go to hell!" The theme of money — money and loss — similarly propels "IRA, My IRA," a return to the straight-ahead, joy-of-investment screamer that El Surge has perfected in live performance. When the final chords fade on "IRA," you know these people aren't singing about the Irish Republican Army!

In a monumental climax to the album, Elective Surgery also completes the final chapter in the epic the band calls its "fitness trilogy." "Stairmasters Of War" is a triumphant, Dylan-esque finish to the song cycle begun back in 1990 with the exuberant "Stairmaster To Heaven," and followed the next year by the dolorous meditation, "The Dark At The Top Of The Stairmaster." When the band sings, "...pulse rate double / stay out of trouble..." it's clear they're not just making music for themselves; they're the choirmasters for an entire generation.

If you only buy one record, tape, CD, or laser disk this year, make it *Sh-Boomer* (available through Woodstock Entertainment). This work is a vital piece of history. The band's motto says it best: "Elective Surgery — it's more than a band; it's a lifestyle choice!"

The Valley Comic News

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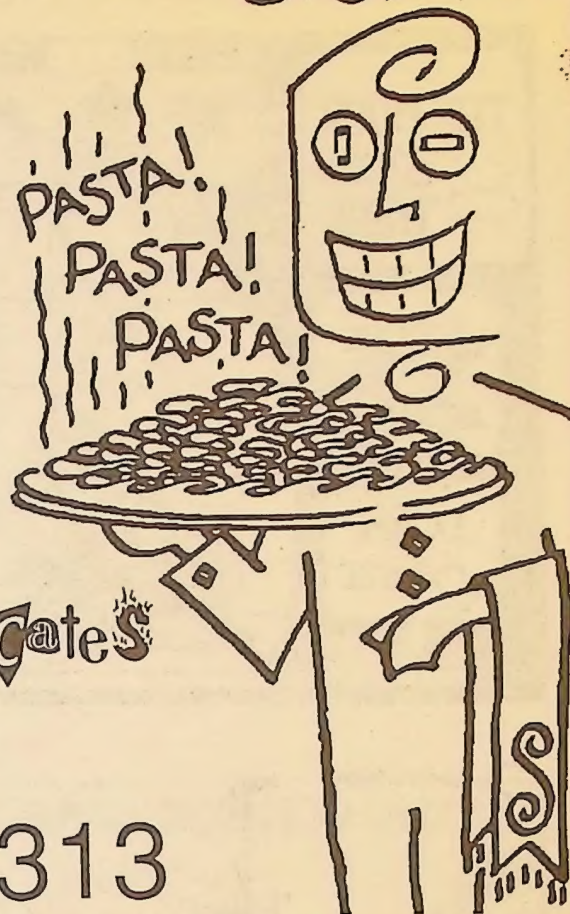
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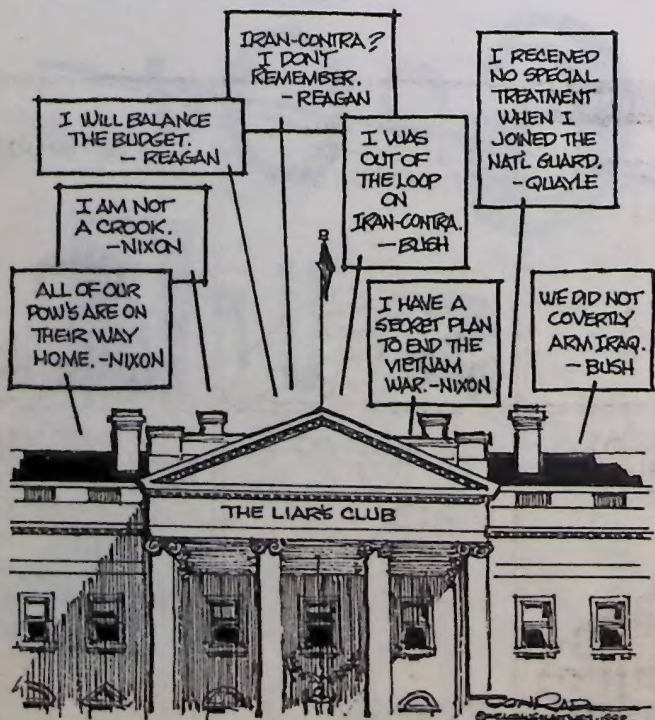
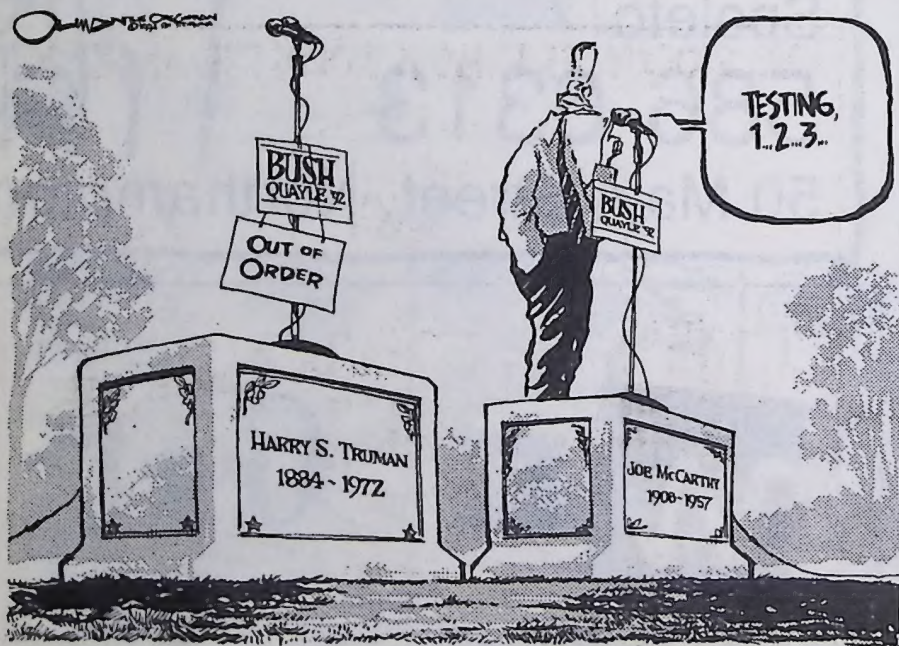
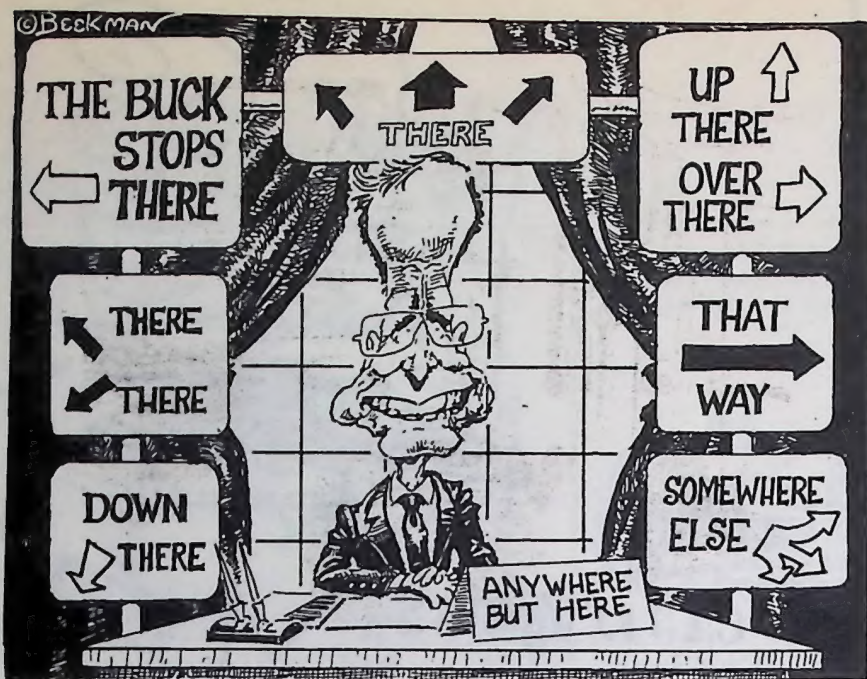
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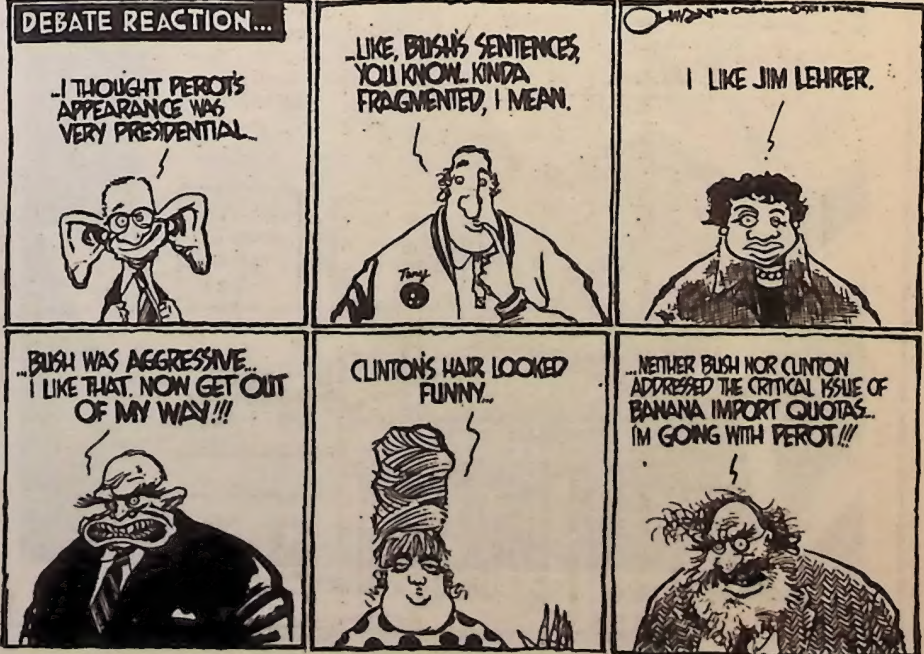
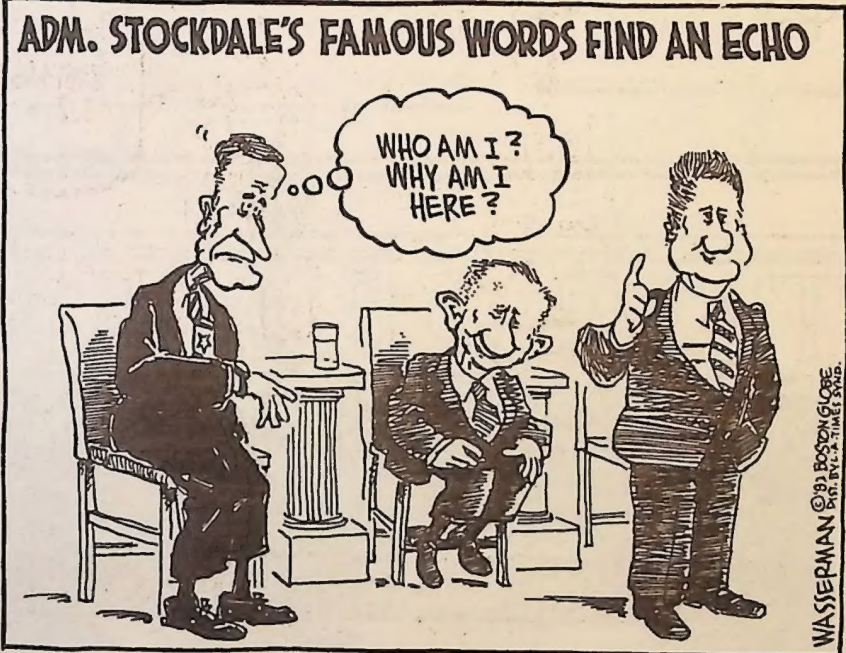
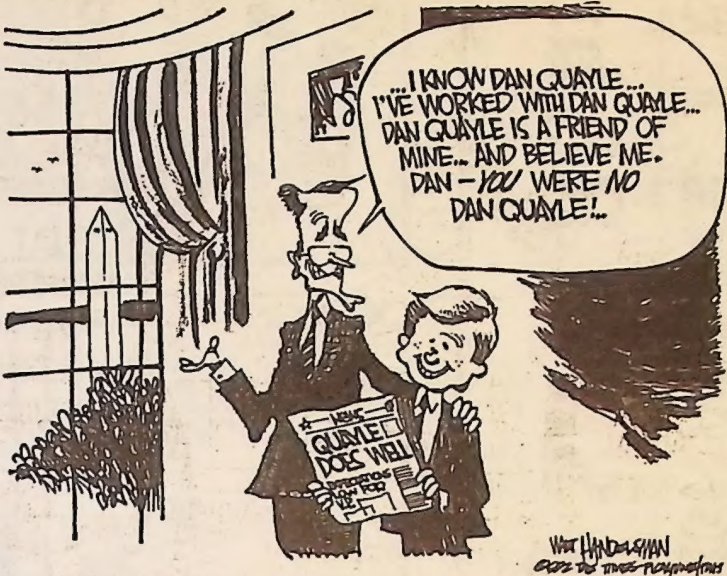
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WHITE HOUSE BLUES



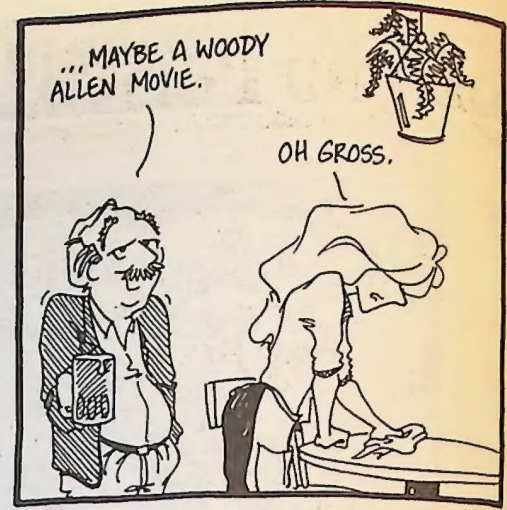
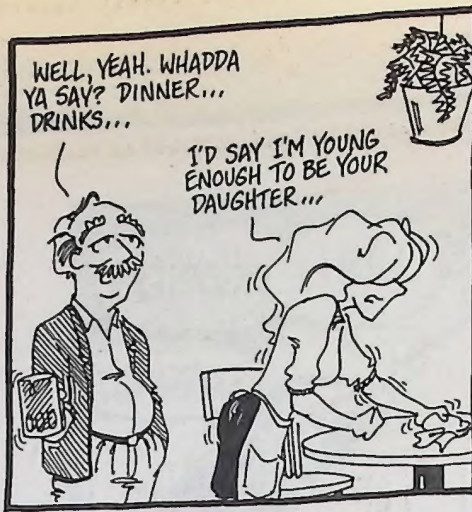
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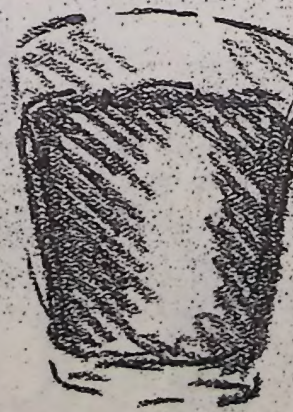
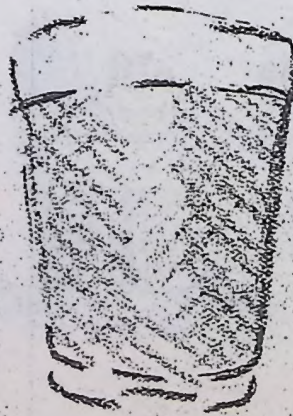
By Steve Riehm



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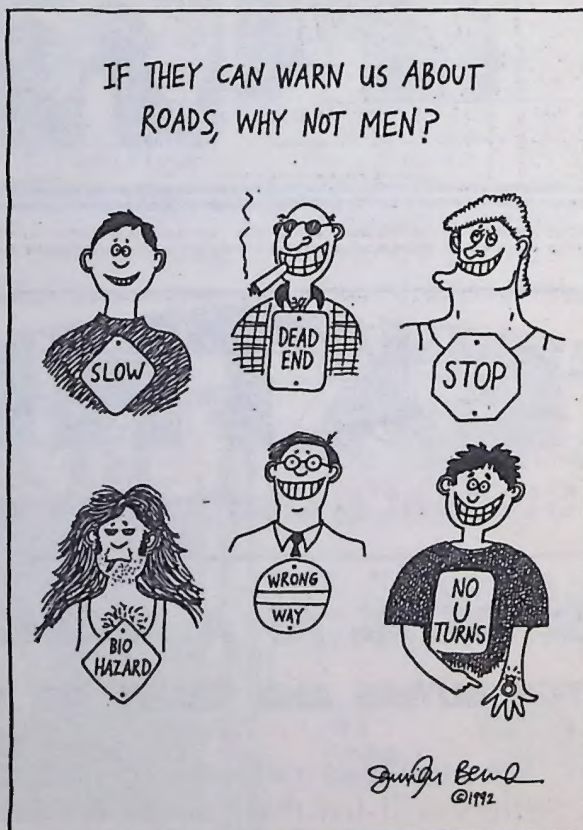


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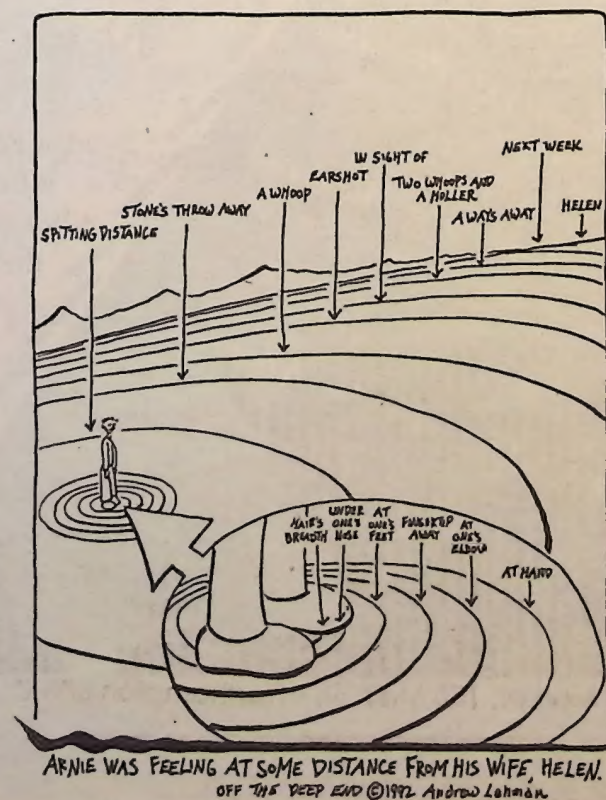
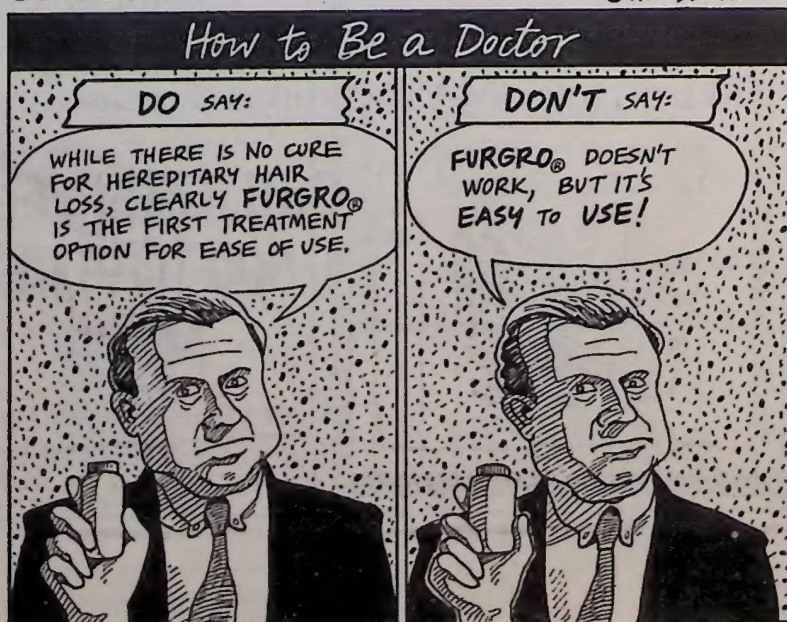
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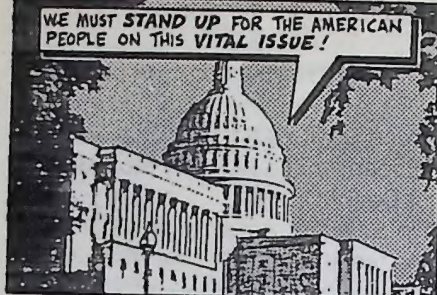


THIS MODERN WORLD BY TOM TOMORROW

THIS MODERN WORLD

OTM T-MRW 10-13-92

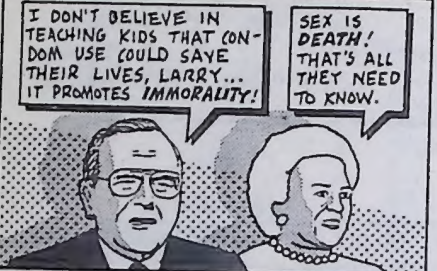
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IN OTHER NEWS, THE FIRST COUPLE APPEARED ON LARRY KING, WHERE THEY DEMONSTRATED THE COMMON SENSE AND KEEN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE WHICH HAS LONG BEEN THE HALLMARK OF THE REPUBLICAN RESPONSE TO AIDS.

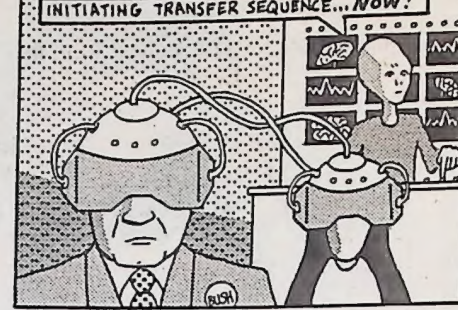


MEANWHILE, AND FOR NO DISCERNIBLE REASON, W. ROSS PEROT IS BACK IN THE RACE... TALKING ABOUT THE NEED FOR AUSTERITY AND SACRIFICE WHILE SPENDING TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS ON A VANITY CAMPAIGN...



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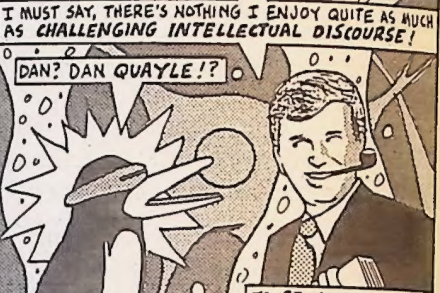
HEY, MAN-- WANNA GET STONED AND BURN AN AMERICAN FLAG?



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NOW, WHO'S THAT UP AHEAD? HE SEEMS FAMILIAR-- BUT THINGS ARE SO STRANGE IN HERE...

TO BE CONTINUED!

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TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT by L.M. Boyd

Q. What do you call that high white hat worn by chefs?
A. A toque. First adopted as signature headgear by Marie-Antoine Careme, master chef to Talleyrand, Napoleon's foreign minister.

The "stage" in "stagecoach" meant the coach took trips in stages — maybe 20 miles each between change of horses.

What you never hear about the nurse Florence Nightingale is that she also was an expert on irrigation techniques in India.

Tarantulas hiss.

Wine was free to the people in ancient Rome. How much wine and to which people isn't altogether clear. What's known is both Claudius and Nero taxed the populace to make wine an entitlement.

African termites dig their own water wells. As deep as 125 feet, if necessary. Down to the water table.

In Dante's Hell, the Devil is in ice, not fire.

The Piper Cub airplane builder William Piper didn't even learn to fly until age 50, and the idea of building his own airplane came later.

An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.

Q. Where'd we get the term "grub" to mean food?

A. It meant "dig" 10 centuries ago. Still does. Then it meant whatever food could be dug up. Finally, it meant just food.

In Thailand, it's the parents of the groom who pay for the wedding.

Any seasoned Scrabble player will tell you the highest-scoring four-letter word without blanks or bonuses is "quiz" — for 22 points. But can you come up with the highest scoring three-letter word? It's "zax" — for 19 points. A zax is a tool for cutting roof plates.

The oldest known fruit is the fig.

New Zealand law requires each dog owner to walk said dog at least once every 24 hours.

The word "typhoon" is from the Chinese "tai" meaning "large" and "phu" meaning "wind." The word "tycoon" comes from "tai" meaning "large" and "chun" meaning "ruler."

Q. Why do the big jets go all the way up to 30,000 feet?

A. The higher the jet's altitude, the less fuel per mile it burns.

Are married couples who have extramarital affairs still in the minority? Evidently not, if researchers Jane and William Appleton have it right. Their study on the matter concludes the statistical odds are fifty-fifty that either the husband or the wife or both sometime will have an extramarital affair.

If you're betting on which condiment sells best in the United States, don't put your money on ketchup. That would've won a couple of years ago, but salsa passed it in 1990.

About half of all Brazilians are of African descent.

Typical speed of a falling raindrop is 20 mph.

Hairs on a tarantula's stomach are like a porcupine's quills, only much smaller. But they also are barbed, and hurt fiercely when the tarantula rubs them into the skin of a victim.

Most heart attacks occur on Monday.

"Dispense with a horse." That was the company motto of the Winton Motor Car Co. of Cleveland, Ohio. It turned up in *Scientific American* in 1898 — in the first automobile advertisement ever.

Uranium is more common than silver.

In professional baseball in 1877, the batter could point to the place where he wanted the pitcher to throw the ball. If the pitcher failed to hit that spot, the umpire could call, "Unfair ball." After nine unfair balls, the batter walked.

If you put something down during the day and can't recall by evening where you put it, wait overnight to rethink. Tests reportedly have proven your short term memory is about 15 percent more efficient in the morning hours.

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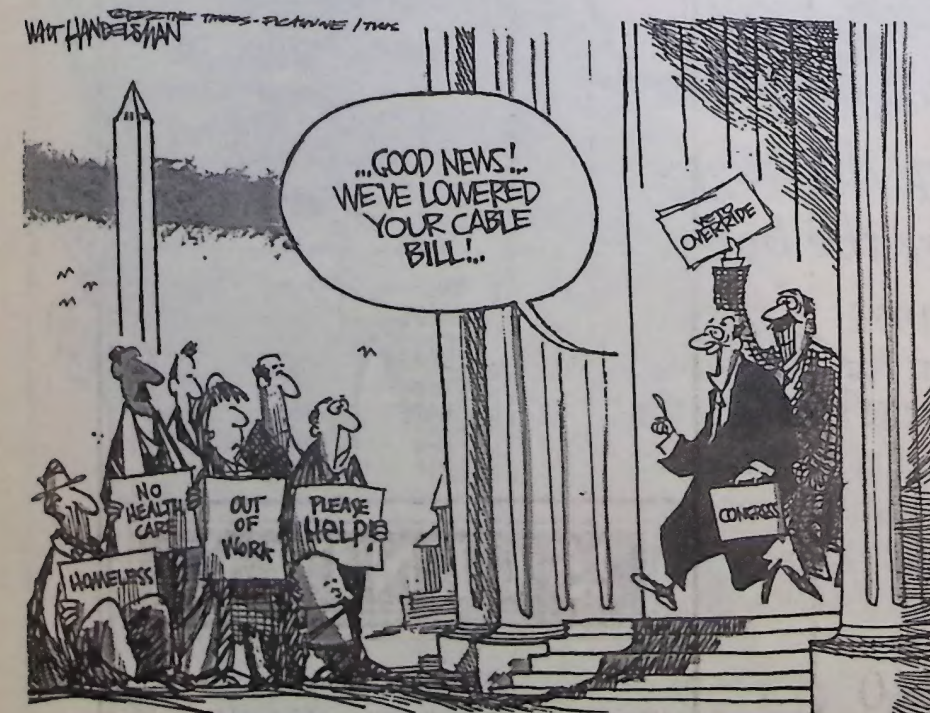
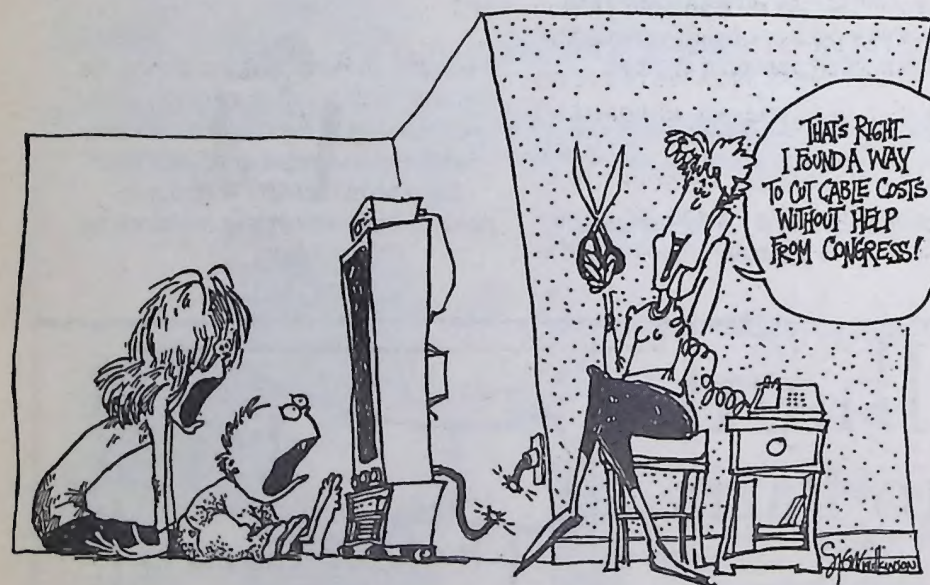
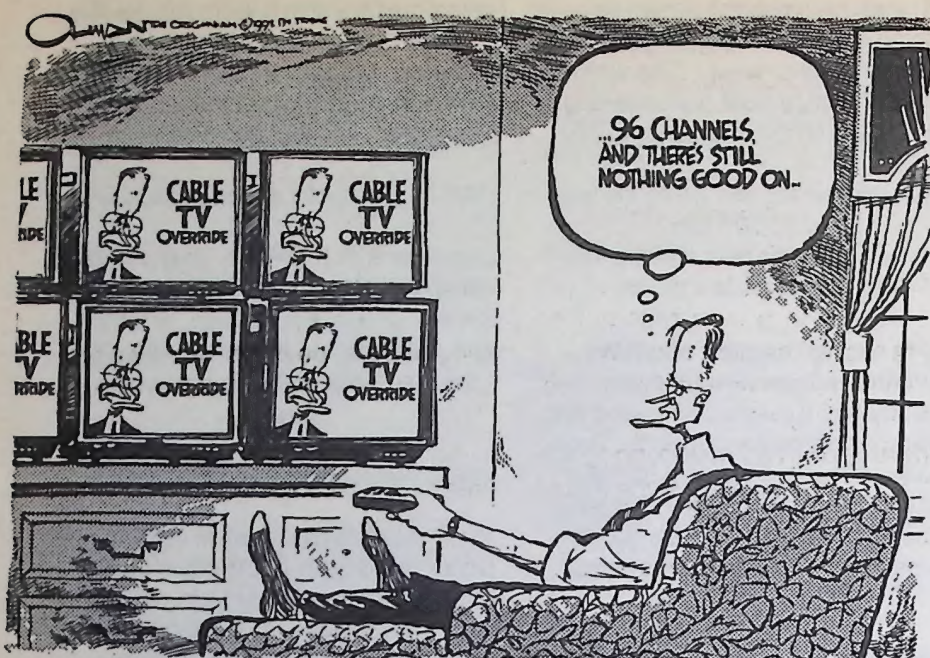
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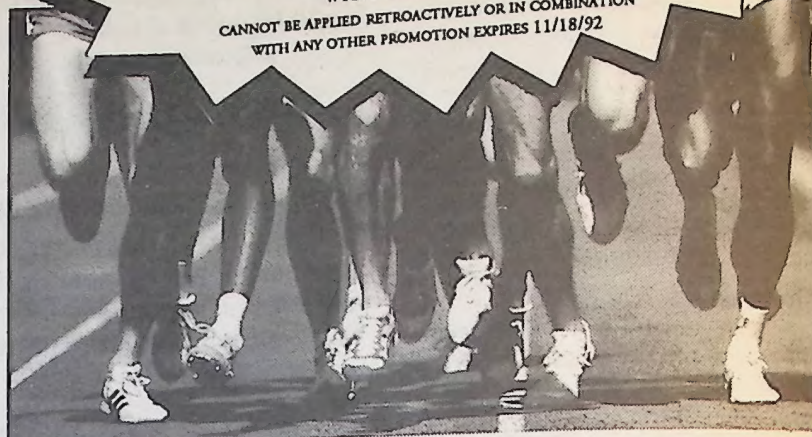
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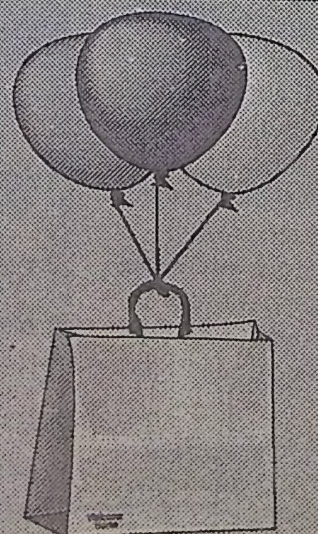
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JOE BOB BRIGGS

Out in Orange County, where the hardcore Republican Yupsters live, they have this model home with a \$3,000 "system controller" inside that allows you to live like the Jetsons. You talk into a voice box, and all of a sudden the TV comes on, or the toaster starts toasting, or the bathtub starts warming up the water, or any of sixty other electronic devices are turned off, turned on, adjusted, controlled, while you walk around in a terry-cloth bathrobe with a remote in your hand, feeling like Don King after he gets a check in the mail.

There's only one problem. They can't sell the goldurn thing. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, more than 25,000 people have trooped through the "Smart House," anxious to see it do its stuff, standing there in awe while the drapes slide open and shut at the touch of a dial. But the National Association of Homebuilders is a little surprised that, after \$40 million of development costs, nobody wants to plunk down a few bucks to actually *live* there.

I think we know why, don't

we?

Women may control most things in life, but the purchase of a house or a car is one thing that men will *not* shut up about. Wanna sell us a \$2,000 washer-dryer combination? Fine. We'll be back in the den, rattling newspapers and watching football. How about that new \$5,000 refinishing job on the wood floors? Great. Call me when the workmen have left the house.

But when it comes to *actually buying a house*, we're gonna get down on the floor and whine and whimper and beat our head against the wall until we get *exactly the one we want*.

And we don't want *any* house with \$3,000 worth of electronic devices in it. Because what's gonna happen six months down the road?

"Honey! Come here! Please hurry! I just pushed this button to dim the patio lights, and hot water started spewing out of the front bathroom sink, and now it's all over the floor. I keep pushing buttons but *nothing* happens. What do I do?"

And the wife has to come in

and tell you that, well, what you did was, you pressed 34-A, when you were *supposed* to press 34-B, and then you panicked and started turning off all the appliances on channel A, instead of simply turning the dial on the back of the remote to....

You get the idea, right?

We're already hopeless idiots about this stuff. I can't even put the batteries in a tape recorder so they're facing the right way. What if you have to open one of those electronic wiring boxes that looks like the main office of AT&T inside, and think to yourself, "Gee whiz, maybe if I just yanked out all the orange ones and replaced them with red ones ... no, that wouldn't work."

Or think of it this way. I already have a remote for my TV, a remote for my cable, and a remote for my VCR. And I can always *find* two of the three remotes — the two that I *don't need*. Now we're gonna add to that a *master remote* that controls the TV, the cable, the VCR, the CD player, the cassette deck, the laserdisc player, the air conditioner, the refrigerator, the lights, the

phones, the security locks on the doors, the burglar alarm, the cookie jar, and the piggy bank....

No thank ya.

Listen to me. I want two choices. "On" and "Off."

Is this clear?

Good.

I'm not buying any house that's smarter than I am.

Iron Joe Bob, Joe Bob's long-awaited book claiming his rightful place as the leader of the Men's Movement, is now available from Atlantic Monthly Press. To discuss the meaning of life with Joe Bob, or to get his world-famous newsletter, write Joe Bob Briggs, PO Box 2002, Dallas, TX 75221. Joe Bob's Fax line is always open: 214-368-2310. **COPYRIGHT 1992 CREATORS SYNDICATE, INC.**



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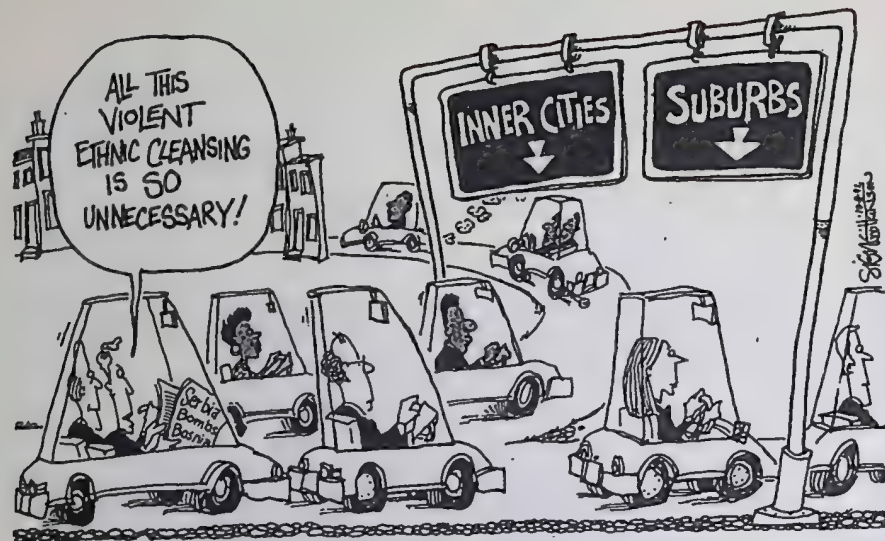


Photo: Jennifer Burdick

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...AND THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE....



Cartoonists & Writers Syndicate



The Valley Comic News introduces a new feature with this issue: a collegiate video film review, by VCN collegiate wise guy John Van Lokeren. (Videos courtesy Pleasant St. Video)

This week I have two movies to write about. The first is the legendary *Repo Man*. The second is the equally interesting *Suburbia*. Both flicks deal with teenage punkers in the Los Angeles scene during the early to mid-eighties.

Repo Man, written and directed by Alex Cox, is the story of a young punker named Otto, played by Emilio Estevez. Otto is your typical angry, anti-establishment teenager who plays by his own rules. His parents have become devout followers of a television evangelist. They stay up all night watching the evangelist, and they give him all their money. Otto is left to rely on himself. He finds employment as a repo man, an occupation that involves taking back people's cars who haven't kept up with their payments. The film also follows the trail of a mad scientist who is carrying a dead alien around in the back of his car as the government attempts to track him down. The government agents hire Otto's repo outfit to find the scientist's car, but this is only the basic plot.

The most appealing feature of *Repo Man* is the great one-liners and conversations between characters. Otto hangs out with many of the older repo men, who are amateur philosophers trying to make sense of a confusing world. The end of *Repo Man* borders on surrealism. I can just imagine a group of modern art students explaining how the end is a representation of society, blah blah blah.... Me, I just dig the ending, period, even though I'm still scratching my head over it. One last piece of info: see if you can spot Mr. Margaritaville himself, Jimmy Buffet, as one of the government agents.

Suburbia, written and directed by Penelope Spheeris, centers around a group of punkers known as "TR" — The Rejected. These kids have set up home on the outskirts of Los Angeles, their safe haven from the cruel world of the early eighties. Flea — from The Red Hot Chili Peppers — plays Razzle, one of the TR. It didn't seem like a real stretch for him to play this character. Flea plays a boy who is a bit on the hyperactive side. One memorable scene has Razzle placing his pet rat halfway down his throat, to demonstrate the strong bond between a boy and his pet. Two other scenes -- one featuring alcoholic moms throwing full bottles of booze at their children, the other a well-choreographed fight between the TR and some punk-haters in a bitchin' Camaro -- ought to appeal to you action/adventure types.

The TR are depressed most of the time, and don't seem to be very optimistic about their future. *Suburbia* isn't a Hollywood hype-up of punks. Instead it's a good shot at showing the boredom and emptiness in their lives.

If you're feeling anti-establishment, then *RepoMan* and *Suburbia* are great movies to watch. If you're a big fan of the status quo, you could use these two movies in a presentation to your local Decency League chapter to show how Satan has taken over the youth of America.

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Earthquakes

E The strongest tremble ever to strike Egypt left more than 400 people dead and destroyed hundreds of buildings around Cairo. The magnitude 5.9 quake was felt as far away as Jerusalem. National archaeological treasures such as the Great Pyramid of Giza and Sphinx were undamaged by the initial quake and the hundreds of strong aftershocks.

A major offshore earthquake damaged buildings and crops in the South Pacific country of Vanuatu. Buildings in the capital of Port-Vila were wrecked, but worse damage was said to have occurred on the southern island of Tana.

Earth movements were also felt in southern Japan, the Aleutian Islands, southern Alaska, Wyoming, and in Northern and Southern California.

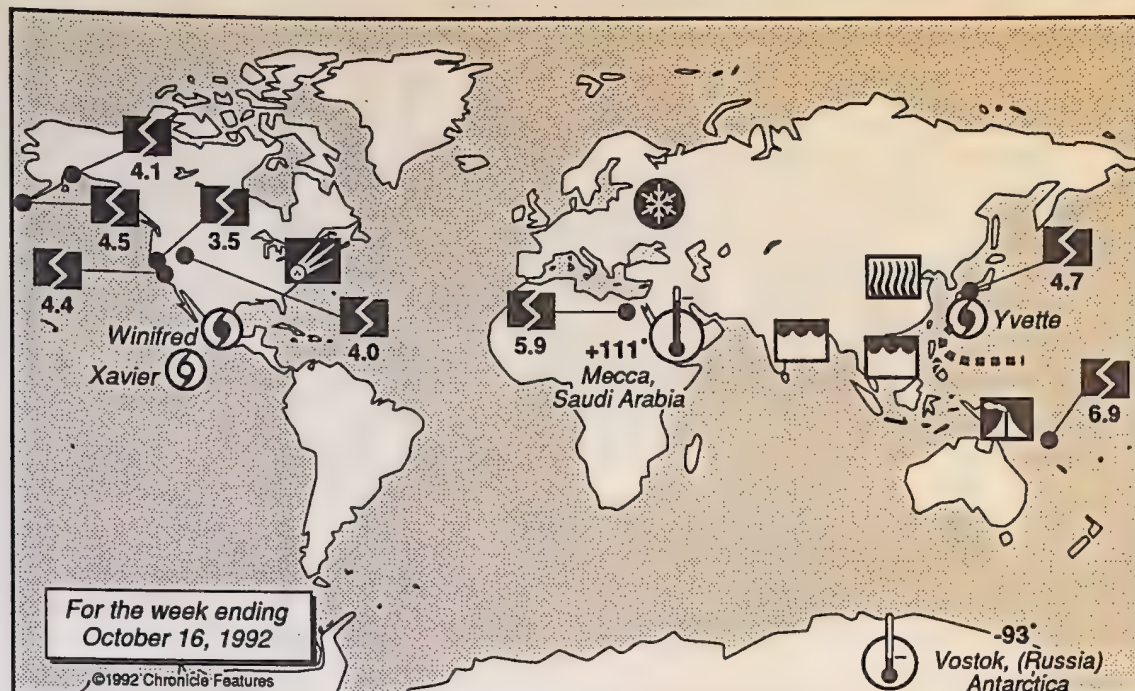
Meteor

A bright and breathtaking display of the Draconids meteor shower produced a fireball that streaked across the Atlantic coast of the U.S. and slammed into the rear of a car parked near Peekskill, N. Y. Michelle Knapp, an 18-year-old high school senior, was at home when she heard a large crash. "The noise of it literally shook the windows," she said. "It sounded like something hit the house." The smashed trunk of her 1980 Chevy Malibu had a hole straight through it. The 30-pound meteorite, or chunk of space debris, was still warm to the touch.

Floods

Indian soldiers joined in relief efforts in the southern state of Kerala where floods triggered by monsoon rains killed more than 50 people and left thousands homeless.

Floods in the central Vietnamese province of Da Nang killed 12 and destroyed large tracts of crops. Between 15 and 20 inches of rain fell at some locations.



Tropical Storms

Hurricane Winifred, the second to strike the same area along the west coast of Mexico within a week, brought high winds and local flooding from Manzanillo to Puerto Vallarta. Tropical storm Xavier formed south of Acapulco, then steadily weakened as it moved westward into open waters.

In the western tropical Pacific, super typhoon Yvette skirted the northern Philippines and was predicted to weaken as it approached southern Japan late in the week.

Eruption

Hundreds of people were evacuated from the area around a volcano on Papua New Guinea's Manam Island after the mountain began spewing ash and lava on nearby villages. The unnamed volcano had weaker eruptions during March and July of this year.

Early Winter

Snow accompanied by icy arctic winds gave Moscow an untimely dose of winter and disrupted the morning rush hour as the Russian capital got its earliest dusting in 16 years. Temperatures dipped to 19 degrees Fahrenheit overnight, and tens of thousands of commuters were delayed as the city's aging fleet of buses and trolleys stalled during the cold snap.

Extreme Measures

A relief team of Russian scientists arrived at the Vostok Antarctic Research Station where the previous crew had been staging a five-month strike during the southern winter to protest low salaries. That team had taken measurements and conducted studies, but refused to transmit the results back to Moscow. Weather data once again flowing from the station show that it is the coldest inhabited place on the planet at this time of year.

It's Alive

Chinese scientists announced that they have "captured" a sample of a rare and gooey creature called slime mold from a river in Shaanxi province. Slime mold is a kind of fungus, and usually found in cool, moist, and dark places such as grasslands, rotten logs, and piles of withered leaves. It can even move across the ground very slowly on its own. A similar sample was found in Dallas, Tex., in 1973, but died within a week of its discovery. Specialists at the biology department of Northwest University in Xi'an say that their fungus is still alive, and has grown by almost a third since being pulled from the river in August. It's 30 inches long and 20 inches wide, and weighs approximately 80 pounds.

Additional Sources: Mexican Meteorological Service, Japan Meteorological Agency, U. S. Climate Analysis Center, U. S. Earthquake Information Center and the World Meteorological Organization.

Why Yes, we do stock a comprehensive collection of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SPECIALS, you will find them in the carousel behind you...

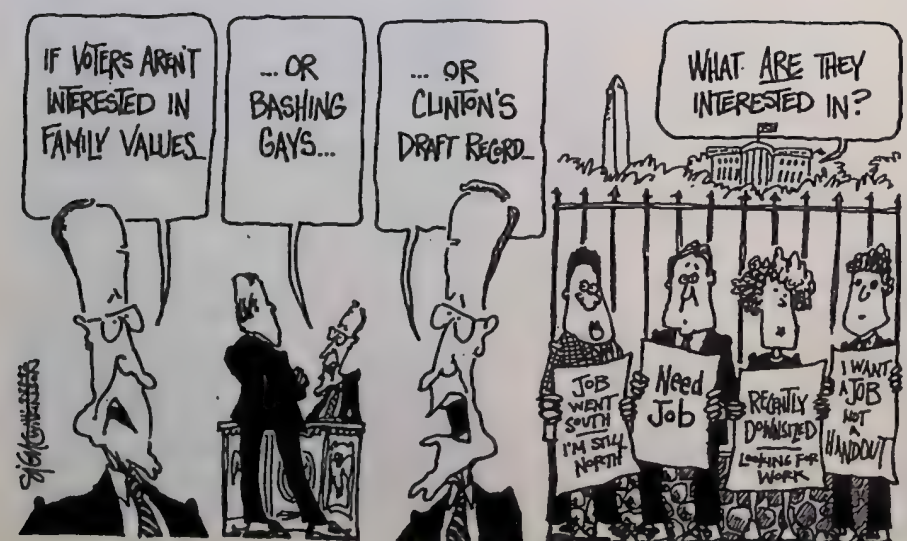
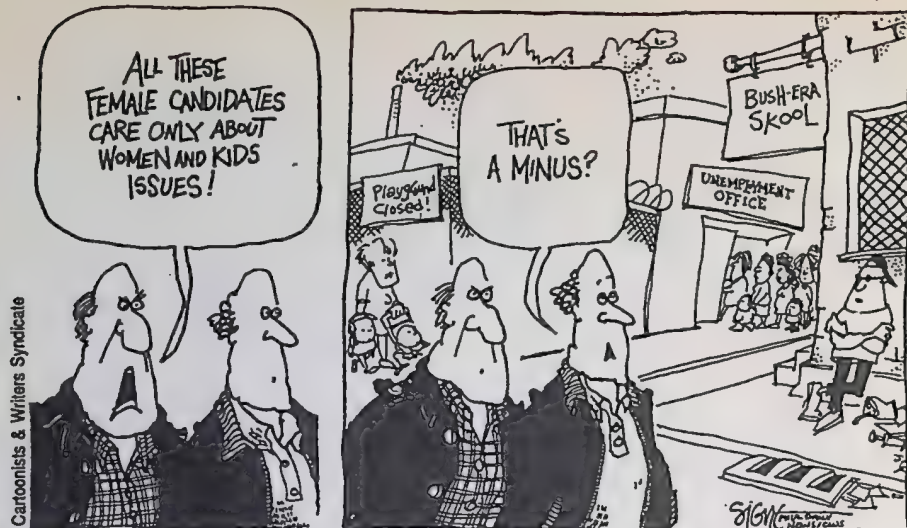


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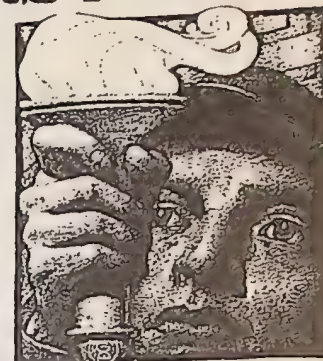


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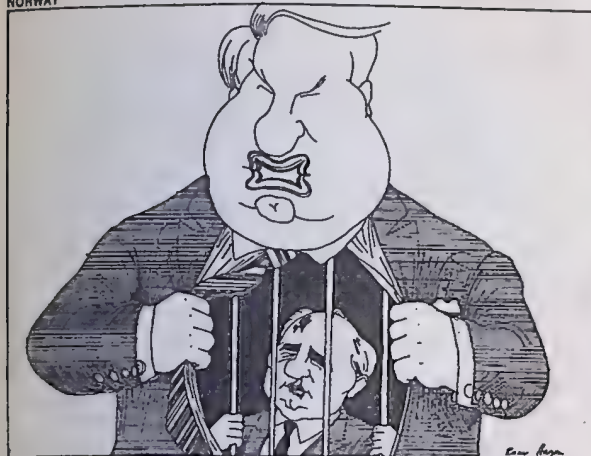
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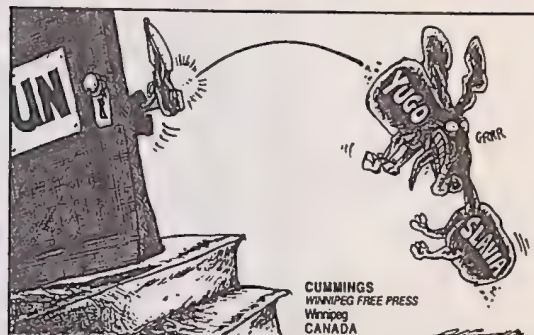
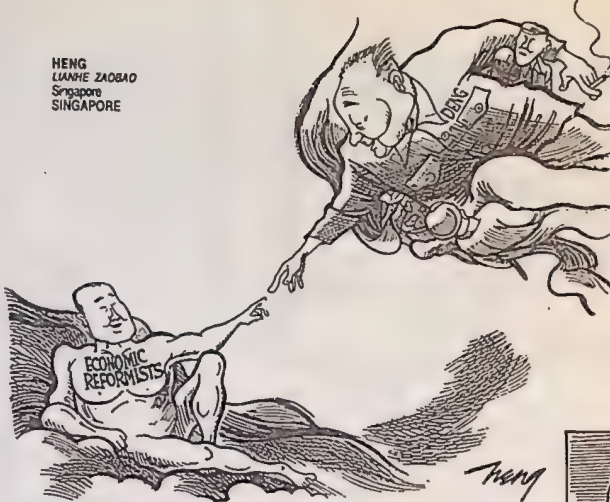


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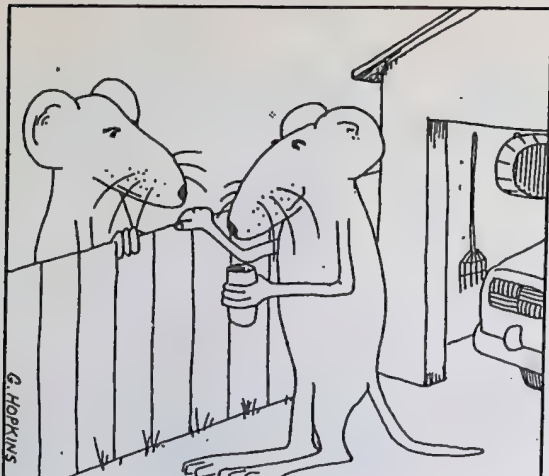
"I got mine at Zanna!"



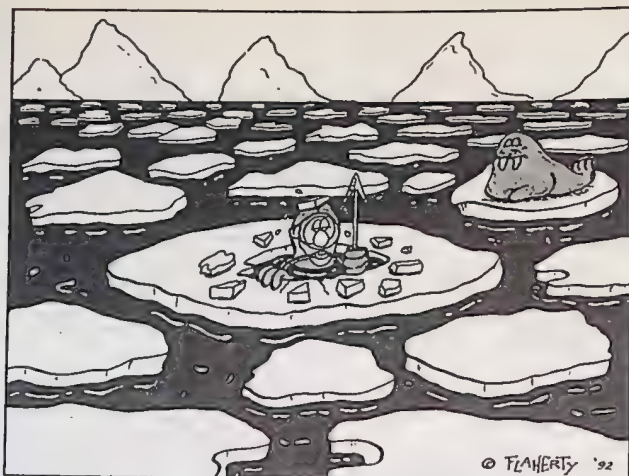
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LOCAL HEROES

dog feathers by Giles Hopkins



AFTER A NUCLEAR WAR, LIFE AS WE KNOW IT WOULD CEASE.

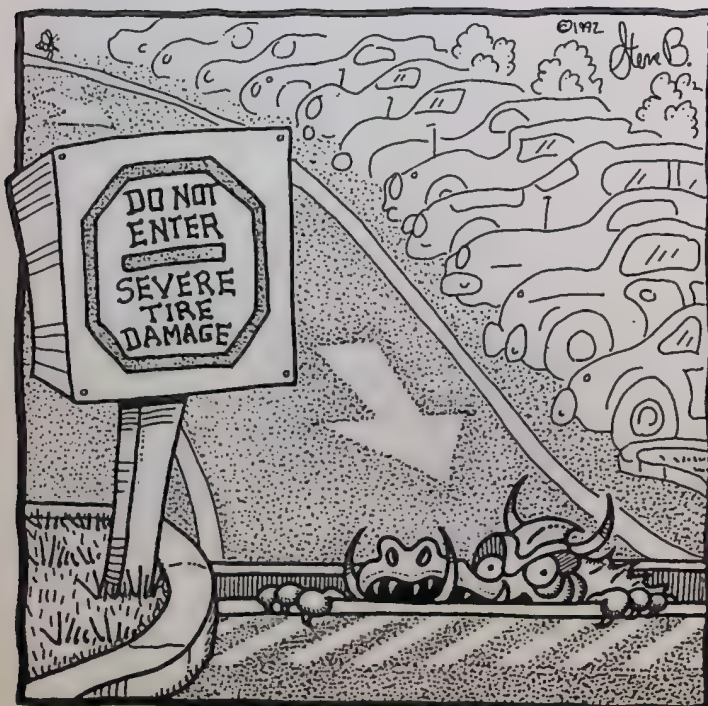
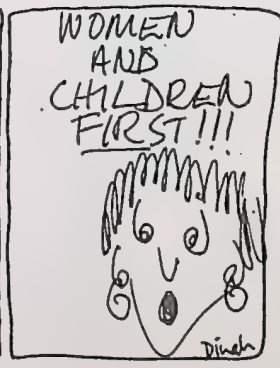
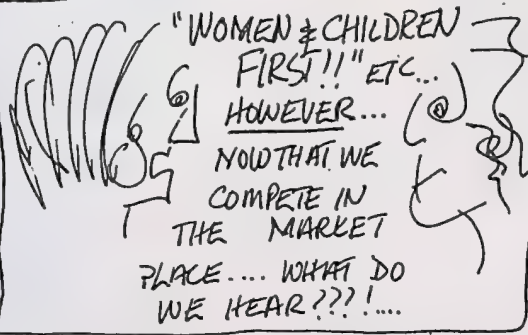


NEARING EXHAUSTION AND RUNNING OUT OF AIR, JIM PUT EVERYTHING HE HAD INTO ONE LAST, DESPERATE THRUST ... AND THE ICE ENTOMBED HIM NO LONGER.

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IN THE DAYS WHEN WE WERE SOMEBODY'S CHATTEL... WHAT DID WE HEAR?... "SPARE THE WOMEN!!"



ROCK & ROLL BABYLON by Tom Sturm



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and let the laughter begin.

• The Comic News Impartial Survey, Inc.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

— a study of the job market, by Teresa Truitt

— That's a tough question, but I can see you're a serious questioner. Ha ha. Well, if I answer honestly ... do you have a minute, I mean, a few minutes?

— Thank you. Now, let me give this some careful thought. You want to know where I see myself in five years, perhaps with this firm, perhaps, say, moving on...? A lot can happen in five years. *And I'm confident it will.*

(Steeple's hands and leans forward)

— Well, certainly not making any less than I do now. In fact, I think it would be appropriate to say that I see, no, I *expect* to make a good bit more in the salary department. Maybe not even being tied down to a specific number. No, I think it would be good, very good, to let that compensation package just swell like an enormous Macy's parade balloon, just *obscenely*, grotesquely *huge* would be fine.

(Crosses legs. Begins tapping crossed knee with index finger)

— Of course not, certainly not solely in terms of salary. I am *not* a shallow person, by any means. In fact — and you'll probably find this hard to believe; most people do — I view my career path as a spiritual appointment, a divine task that enables me to spread love and acceptance and healing, both quarterly and in regularly-scheduled meetings. I can see where staff managers and even partners would come to rely on me as a steady rock in any storm, a regular *Gibraltar* of caring and efficiency. I see no reason to sacrifice our mutual humanity to ridiculous goals or meaningless achievements, but don't get me wrong: I'm Mr. Can-Do, Mr. Midnight Oil, Mr. Bottom-Line. Ultimately I could become a figure of worship and adoration, dispensing equal amounts of compassion and corporate wisdom. Something like a saint.

(Strokes chin thoughtfully)

— Now, *there's* an intriguing area to think about. It's true that there is no business without clients, so I have some really *unique* methods I'd like to employ in winning and servicing them. In five years I see clients *flocking* to whatever firm I'm with, so original are these ideas. *No, no, I'm not going to tell you what they are.* They're too powerful, too raw and intense to simply bandy back and forth. They take time and patience, and yes, even genius to implement. Some clients need a lot of encouragement to trust a representative. Understand, I'm willing to do *anything* to gain that trust: kidnap, maim, kill. Violence is only one of many tools in my, heh heh *arsenal de commerce*.

(Rapid kick, leaps onto chair seat, holds briefcase over head)

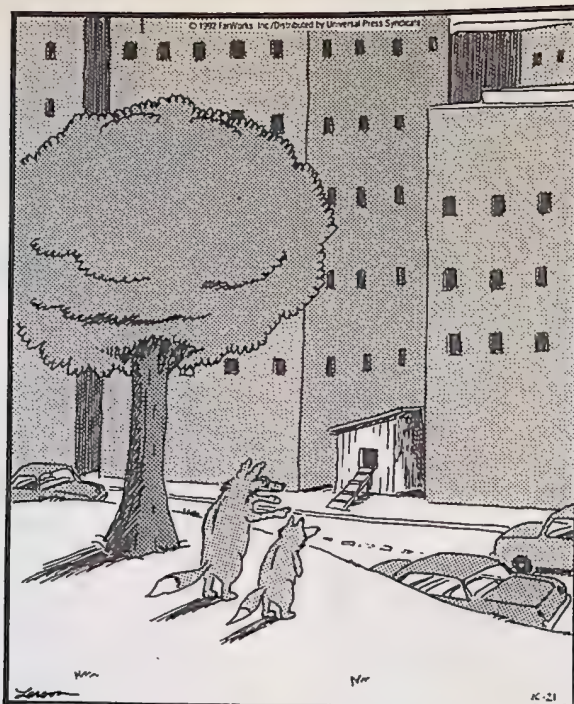
— Oh, come on! There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm just a regular Midtown Jungle Jim; you know it's a wilderness out there. Yeah, I'm a wild man, all right. I can live on *nothing* and dirty air. I can simply *smell* what I need and what I want, and I go after it. I can see that in five years my skills will be so finely honed, I'll be positively *feral*, hunting at night to conceal my pallor, breaking my scent trail by wading in fountains, creating contracts on discarded newspapers and strip-joint flyers, as single-minded as a heat-seeking missile.

THE FAR SIDE

BY GARY LARSON



The woods were dark and foreboding, and Alice sensed that sinister eyes were watching her every step. Worst of all, she knew that Nature abhorred a vacuum.



"Well, I'll be! It's still there! The hen house I used to watch as a kid!"



Suddenly, there he was, running along the far shore right in front of Bob and Vera, who would always remember they once saw the legendary "Character of the Lake."

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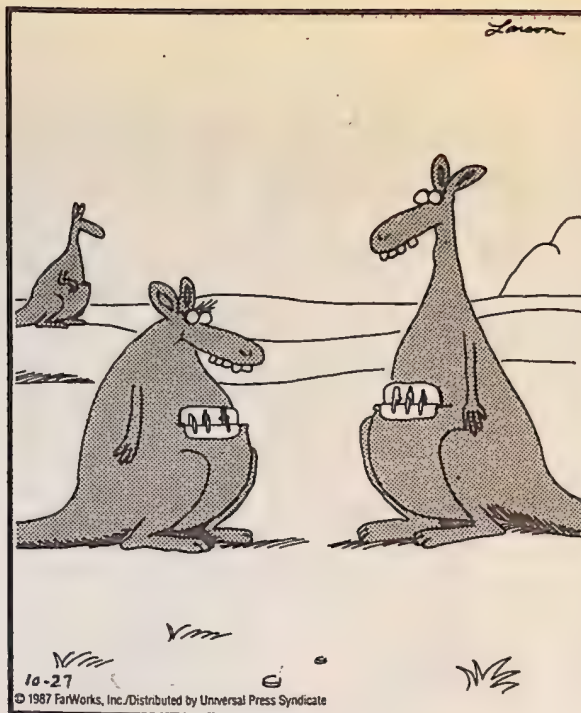
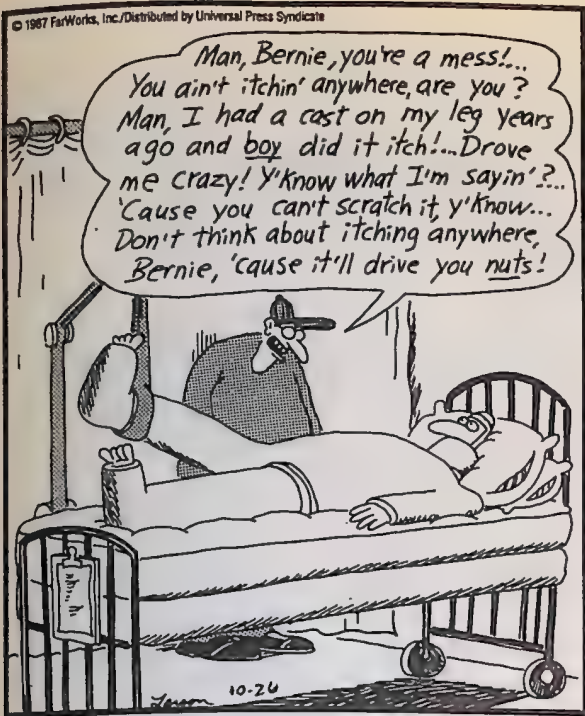
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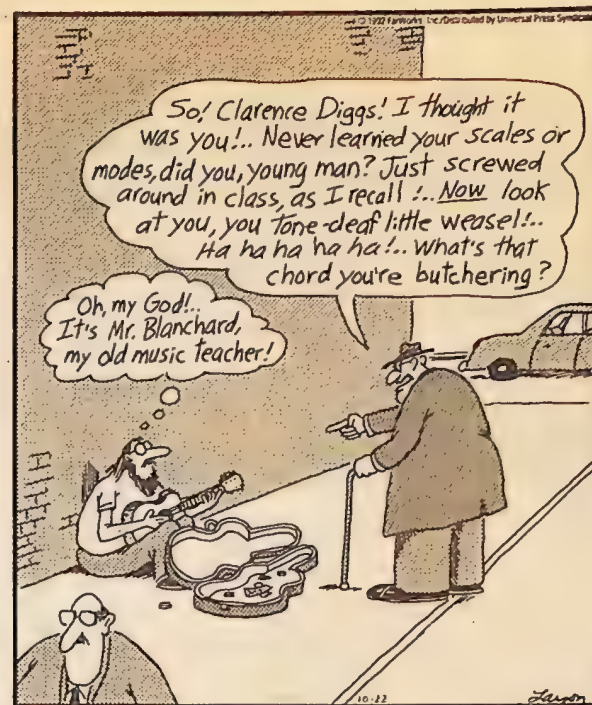
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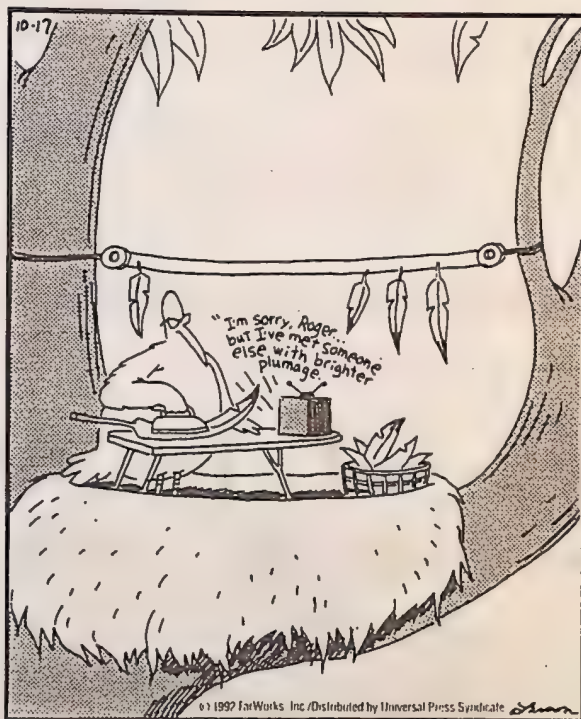
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Kangaroo nerds



"Louis... phonecaw."



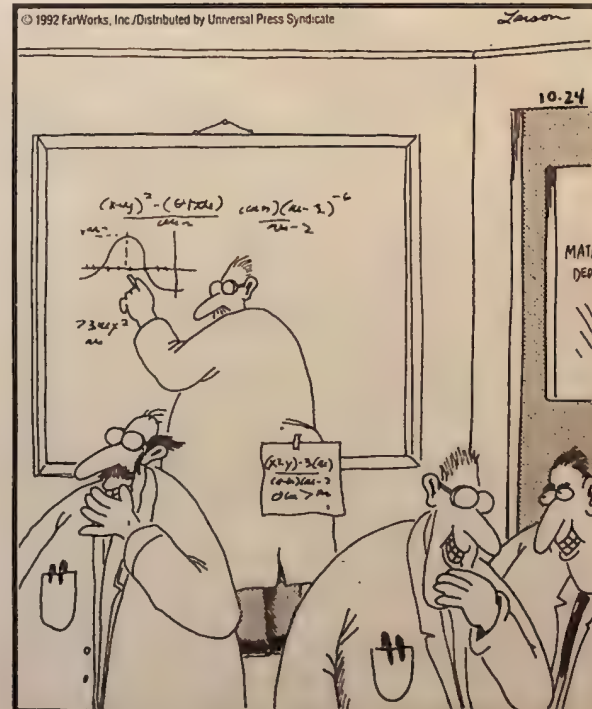
"Nerd!... Dang!"



"Yes! Yes! That's it!... Just a little higher."



"Little Bear! A watched head never gets eaten by ants."



LEOLD

BY ROGER SALLOOM

Sometimes I make mistakes and let out my real feelings.

I should only let out my real feelings to my minister...

no,no,to my mother

no,no, my aunt Sally

nope, my close friend Weldon

no,no, to my dog

my grocer...

yeah, to my grocer

no, no, my grocer's wife,yeah.

I should discuss only my real feelings with my grocer's wife.

She has complete access to the deli meats,and the deli meats are more important than my feelings.

Yes, that settles it. I should eat deli meats instead of discussing my feelings.

What a relief!

But I should eat only certain deli meats....not just any old meats...meats with little silver specks in it.

And I should continue buying this ginseng from the grocer's wife.

It helps me think clearly and decisively.



calvin and Hobbes

by BILL WATTERSON

HELLO, COUNTY LIBRARY? YES, DO YOU HAVE ANY BOOKS ON WHY GIRLS ARE SO WEIRD?



THAT'S WHAT I SAID. OR YOU MIGHT ALSO TRY LOOKING UNDER "OBNOXIOUS."



ARE YOU SERIOUS?? YOU MEAN THERE'S NO RESEARCH ON THIS AT ALL??



I'LL BET THE LIBRARY JUST DOESN'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW.



MOM? MOM?

I'M TAKING A BATH, CALVIN.



OH, OK, NEVER MIND IT WAS NOTHING.

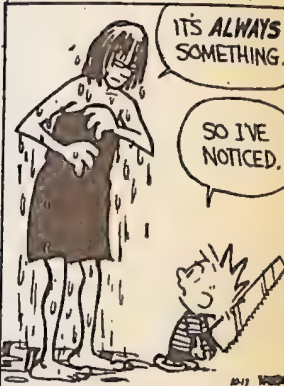


SPLISH SPLASH SPLOOSH



IT'S ALWAYS SOMETHING.

SO I'VE NOTICED.

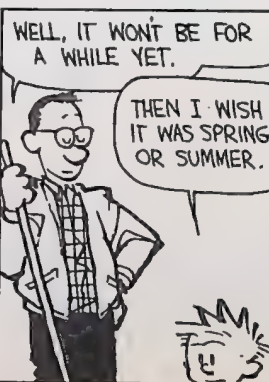


I WISH IT WAS WINTER.



WELL, IT WON'T BE FOR A WHILE YET.

THEN I WISH IT WAS SPRING OR SUMMER.



YOU DON'T LIKE AUTUMN?

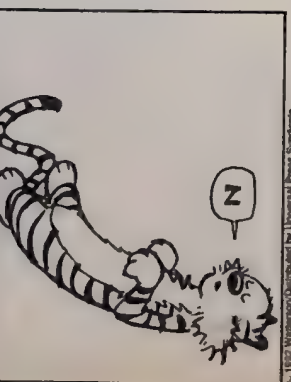
OH, AUTUMN IS FINE.



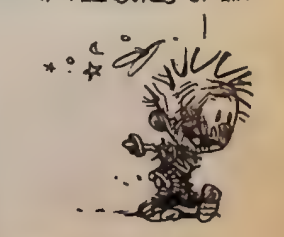
IT'S THE PRESENT I DON'T LIKE.

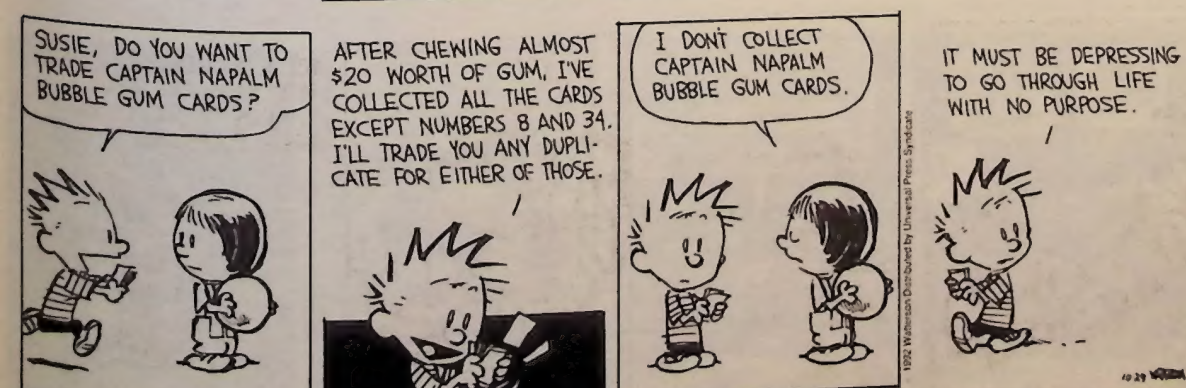
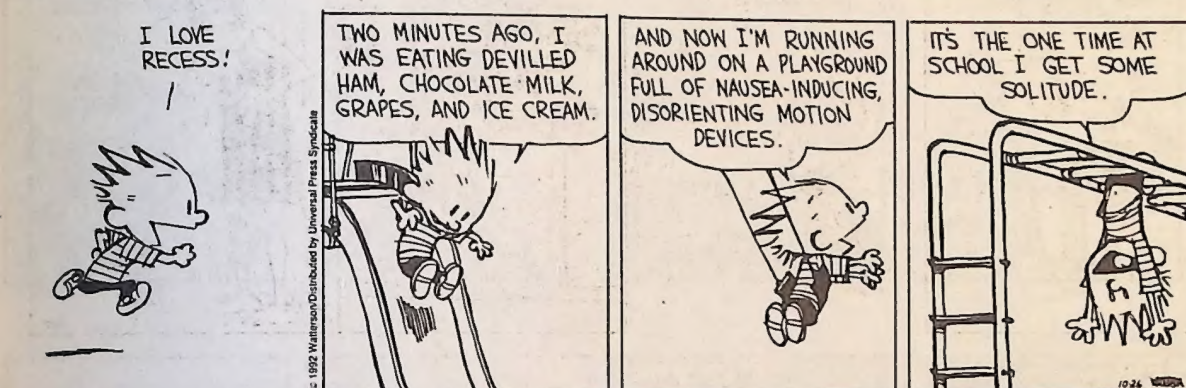


THERE REALLY OUGHT TO BE A FALL OLYMPICS.



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humor me

by Izzy Gesell

In the beginning the telephone was a fairly straightforward invention. It allowed one person to speak with another, requiring only that the second person be there to answer the phone. Until telephone answering machines, the world was divided into two kinds of people: one could let the phone ring without answering it, the other had to pick up if at all possible. I grew up in a home where answering was required.

The rule was, "If you hear it ring you must try and get it." Many a time I bolted up the stairs to the second floor apartment where we lived and attempted to unlock the door and answer the phone on or before the fourth ring. I never figured out why no one who called my home ever let it ring more than 4 times. If I'd hear the first ring while downstairs, I'd be able to bolt up the steps and reach the door by the end of the second ring. Getting my key out, into the lock and pushing the door open was done to the third ring. Sprinting through the house and lunging for the phone, I'd heavingly answer just as the fourth ring ended.

As a speechless black totem silently perched on its stand, the telephone demanded certain rituals. It was taboo to answer on the first ring. To do so would be to incur the wrath of the gossip god, summoned by the incantation, "What were you doing? Sitting on the phone?" In my immigrant family's homage to the national pastime, whoever was going to answer the phone had to clearly yell, "I got it" to prevent a collision as phone-takers converged from different sections of the apartment. The phone was a kind master; it demanded quick response, not blood.

The process of answering the phone is much more complicated these days. It is possible to be home, not answer the phone and still know who is calling. I guess screening your calls is fine if you feel comfortable eavesdropping. I get somewhat paranoid when a friend pleads with me to pick up the phone if I'm there. An ominous feeling seeps through me that the caller can hear the sounds I make while I listen in. When I screen calls I mute the TV, switch on a white-noise machine and stand statue-still.

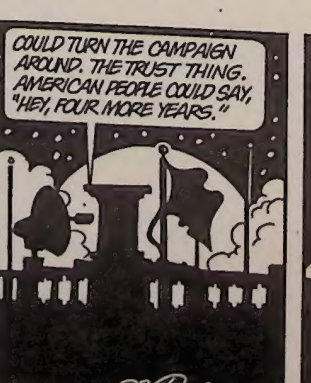
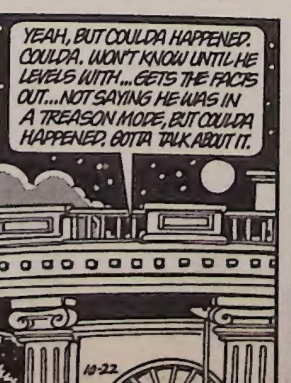
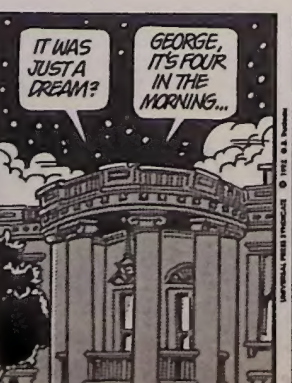
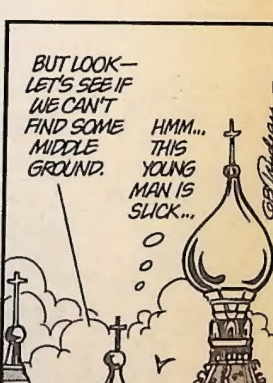
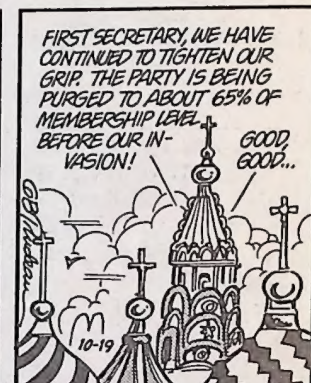
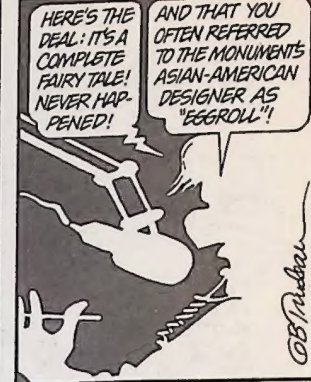
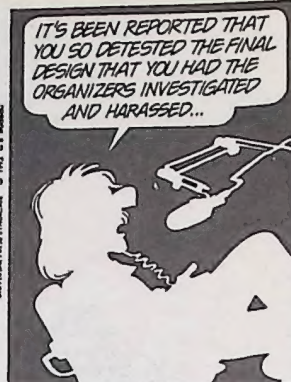
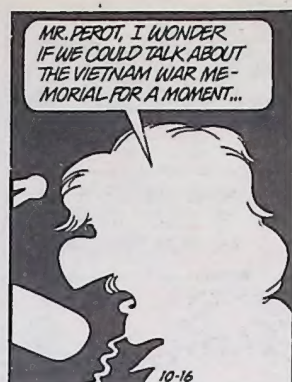
We call-screeners had better start worrying. Now available after thirty years of pre-production hype, picture phones allow you to see the person at the other end of the line. I'll bet someone is perfecting a visual answering machine for the picture phone. This means the caller will be able to know if the call is being evaluated. Eventually, call-screeners will be forced to dive behind furniture to avoid answering the phone.

Caller ID is a device that informs you who is calling by displaying their phone number. It's a good idea, but it doesn't go far enough. Not only do I like to know who is calling, I like to know WHY. Caller Justification would be the home equivalent of voice mail; "If you are calling just to chat, press 1. If this is a sales call, press 2. If this is a person I don't know, press 3. If you want something from me, press 4. If you are going to give me something, press 5. If I was in the shower when the phone rang and I hurried out and answered the phone dripping wet and I'd be glad I did it, press 6. If I was in the shower, hurried out dripping wet and I'd be pissed off, press 7."

So far I've resisted Call Waiting but I have purchased Call Ending. This device makes the all-too-familiar Call Waiting signal. This lets me off the phone any time I like because of the universal agreement to relinquish the line if the other party gets a "long distance call." Hey, I got somebody on the other line. I'll get back to you.

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BY G.B. TRUDEAU



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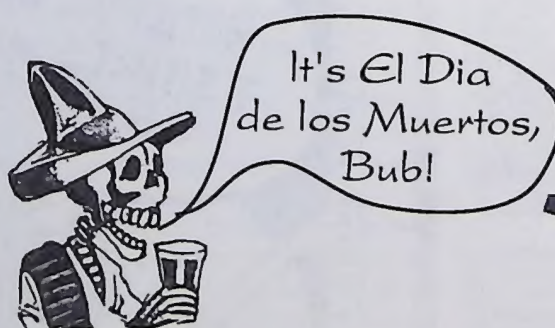
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